

VAU.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 12, 2020

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We invite any media interested in interviewing our VA staff to learn more about care and services to contact our Public Affairs Officer at 989-497-2500, extension 13020 or e-mail tara.scheuer@va.gov

A Veteran's Wake Up Call – Aleda E. Lutz VA Medical Center

Sitting in his doctor's office, weighing the most he had ever been at 293 pounds, Veteran Michael Richards' doctor confronted him with a question that would change his life. "Are you trying to be a diabetic?" This doctor, whom he trusted and respected, had just jolted him into the realization he needed to change his ways. At that very moment, while at the Gaylord VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic, Mr. Richards made the choice to take control of his health and wellbeing.

The doctor provided Mr. Richards with education on carbohydrates and calorie counting. With the support of his wife, they began making healthier eating choices and found it was easier than they had anticipated. They worked on giving up some of their unhealthy habits, didn't feel deprived and found themselves enjoying the new healthy alternatives they discovered. Mr. Richards was also introduced to a Whole Health Coach. She encouraged and assisted him in setting attainable goals. Together, he and his coach set up bi-weekly action steps and goals for him to follow, while exploring barriers and back-up plans. He looked forward to the calls because of her compassion, she was a good listener and she helped hold himself accountable.

As he started to lose the weight, he began to notice positive changes in his life. He always had a workout routine, then it got easier. A year later, he was now at a weight in which he was able to be approved for knee surgery; that old injury was now going to be addressed. He received his knee replacement and continued eating healthy and exercising. Mr. Richards is now weighing in at 219 pounds, a weight he hasn't been since serving in Vietnam. He continues to work with his Whole Health Coach and is closing in on his long-term goal of 200 pounds, a goal he never thought he would reach. His coach stated, "there is nothing this man cannot accomplish, and I have no doubt he will reach his long-term goal. He is an ideal coaching candidate who is ready, willing, and motivated to make the changes he needs."

He is thankful for the support of his loving wife and the VA staff, who have helped him along with his journey. Embracing the lifestyle changes he made, Mr. Richards states, "I feel accomplished, I've started over and I'm doing things right!" His hope is that by sharing his story, his fellow Veterans will realize they, too, can accomplish the lifestyle

changes they need to improve their health and wellbeing. Don't be afraid to change the conversation with your provider, let them know what is important to you, and explore all the tools and resources the VA has to offer to support your journey.

The Aleda E. Lutz VAMC in Saginaw, Michigan operates an 81-bed skilled nursing and rehabilitation Community Living Center. It provides care to over 37,400 Veterans in a 35-county geographic area, from mid-Michigan to the Mackinac Bridge. Veterans also receive care at one of our nine VA Community Based Outpatient Clinics located throughout Michigan. More information about this VA can be found at www.saginaw.va.gov.

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